

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

*****news release

For Release NOVEMBER 28, 1962

ADDRESS BY SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR STEWART L. UDALL AT DINNER MEETING OF GREAT SWAMP COMMITTEE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION, FAR HILLS INN, SOMMERVILLE, NEW JERSEY, NOVEMBER 27, 1962

"CAN SWAMPS REDEEM THE MODERN CITY?"

It is, I think, a sad commentary on modern civilization that the theme of my remarks tonight might well be: "Can swamps redeem our cities?"

Even a few years ago, this question could not have been asked seriously in public because swamps were regarded by all good citizens as an obstacle of "progress." Swamps typified one of man's most dangerous foes--untrammelled nature--and man could not be safe and secure until they were drained, burned, eliminated--and then covered with aseptic asphalt and cement.

Today the tragedy is not that we can ask seriously "Can swamps redeem our cities?" The tragedy rather is that many will reply that not even swamps can redeem the city of today.

In 1962, the status of our cities, and the lives of the people who reside in them, is such that:

(1) the superb feats of our architects and builders are largely nullified by a compounding of congestion and a further tainting of our air and water;

(2) the expansion of the Atlantic Coast megalopolis means "growth", but it also means that asphalt and manmade things are daily diminishing the domain of nature;

(3) even the new cultural gains of our cities are offset by an increase in noise and disruption which create new strains and conditions that are basically hostile to a life-giving environment.

In other words, looked at in the round, our pattern of progress is a process of one step forward here and one step backward there, and to many of us it seems that overall our losses balance out our gains.

However, at risk of being branded as an incurable optimist I want to assert firmly that I do believe that the conservation of swamps and marshes can help to redeem our modern cities.

Certainly, there can be no doubt that conservation leaders are gaining encouraging public support for the preservation of swamp wildernesses in the midst of our great cities.

Not long ago, a farsighted group of Philadelphia conservationists purchased the Tinicum marsh, a 200-acre swamp on the outskirts of Philadelphia, for preservation as a permanent sanctuary of nature and, just a few weeks ago when I was in Madison, Wisconsin, the Council of that gorgeous city announced the purchase of the 500-acre Cherokee Marsh for preservation within the city limits.

Tonight, of course, we are marking a giant step forward in our campaign to try to help save the modern city for in dedicating and preserving New Jersey's "Great Swamp" set in the midst of one of the most crowded areas of the eastern megalopolis we can recall the words of Thoreau: "A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it....."

It is all too true that Thoreau was a pioneer, far ahead of his time. No one but a Thoreau could have dreamed even 25 years ago of the significance that swamps and their values in wildlife and nature's freedom would assume in the minds and hearts of the city-bound modern man. It is perhaps because more each day sensitive men feel a need for the healing solitude of nature.

Let us hope this recognition has not come too late. For in the world of nature, paradise lost cannot be regained.

Here in New Jersey--in this hub of commerce where people are crowded more densely than anywhere in the United States--you have had the foresight to dedicate 2,081 acres of your precious land to its highest use--perpetuation in its natural state.

The dedication of this sea coast lowland not only preserves a unique and valuable area, but demonstrates that people are learning to see with the eye of the poet, rather than just the ardor of the builder and the conqueror of nature. For it takes the modern eye to see the miracles of life in the woodlands and bogs of the Great Swamp where too many of our forefathers would have seen only a challenge to man's ingenuity in changing and controlling nature.

In a very real sense what we are talking about tonight is the change in man which is being wrought by our urban culture and its pressures. When our ancestors came to America, when they moved in the great migration to the West, they fought nature. The trees needed to be cut to clear the way for farms. The swamps had to be drained. The rivers and the streams had to be harnessed.

Today we are coming, I think, to realize that we have won our fight with nature all too well. The roads have been cut, the swamps have been drained, and too many of our rivers have been degraded from channels of beauty to the squalor of public sewers.

We are learning that the search of modern, urban man is not for new ways to conquer nature--but for ways to save the beauty of the out-of-doors so that, to use Robert Frost's words, man can gain new insight from "country things."

This rationale has motivated your effort to establish the Great Swamp as a permanent sanctuary for the enrichment of the lives of the city-bound millions living near it. The same rationale is behind the movement I see growing all over America. Your own Green Acres Program to provide \$60 million worth of open space for the people of New Jersey and the \$75 million "Now or Never" conservation program in New York are models of community foresight from which every State can learn.

We are working against the relentless ticking of the clock--time is against us in our efforts to preserve open space. That is why President Kennedy has put the energy of national leadership to this endeavor by his recent establishment of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation to act as a focal point for all those groups--Federal, State, local--working toward a common goal.

Already opportunities have been lost all over the Nation in the mighty tug-of-war quandry for open space. The sand dunes on the Indiana shores of Lake Michigan were offered as a national park 26 years ago for the modest price of \$200 per acre. The opportunity slipped by, and today neither love nor money can buy those same much-altered lands from their commercial commitments.

Seattle, awaking from its Century 21 celebrations, finding that in mid-20th Century, its excellent arboretum has become the basement to an overhead bridge and expressway system, while in San Diego, one-fifth of historic Balboa Park is occupied by schools, shops, hospitals, and highways.

Many of the Nation's finest wilderness areas are falling prey to the quest of mineral resources that may never be there, and in other areas, a few weeks of patch logging are ruining wilderness hiking for decades into the future.

Twenty-five years ago, a survey found a dozen outstanding national seashore sites on the Atlantic Coast. Today, two of these, Cape Hatteras and Cape Cod are deeded in public trust. The others have not yet washed out to sea but are under attack by real estate speculation, despite the harsh storm warnings of the danger of building our houses upon the sand.

One of the finest opportunities for a scenic recreation mecca lies right in the Nation's Capital. The wide estuary and the upstream palisades and waterfalls of the Potomac River could be a sailing, swimming, and strolling site without parallel in the world. Instead the river and its banks are wasted by myopic speculative schemes and jurisdictional babblings. Justice Douglas has nicknamed the Potomac, "The Chocolate River," for its burden of filth. A far cry from the "green and moist solitude" that to Alex de Tocqueville characterized our great national rivers 90 years ago.

We need no prophet to tell us that the problems of land abuse and competing use are going to increase with time. It behooves us, to sort out the differences and with the clearest and most visionary planning, assure that those areas which should be preserved, are preserved. Creative use should be made of the numerous tools of land allocation: enforceable zoning, scenic and conservation easements, and permanent methods of pollution control. Before irrevocable decisions are made, the quiet values of singing bird and sloshing marsh should be given their full day in court.

A special study done for the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission shows that three out of four Americans go no further than 50 miles from home for a day's recreational relaxation. The vast areas of the Far West are not going to solve the need of open space for eastern metropolitan dwellers who want a few hours surcease from crowds and television sets. The solutions must be found near at hand, where land costs are so high, as this group is well aware.

When Major Gherman S. Titov, the Russian astronaut, visited New York last spring, he was asked by reporters what he thought of the city after the first day of his visit. His answer was pertinent: "There are too many cars here and there is very little green."

The Great Swamp Committee has performed nobly in saving some greenery for the greater New York region. One of the most noteworthy aspects of your achievement in saving Great Swamp is its liaison of Federal and private endeavor. Too often and too unfortunately local landowners are the opponents of dedicated parks and wildlife refuges.

In the case of Great Swamp, your energetic philanthropic undertaking is, to me, as dramatic in its way, as the long-memorable event commemorated at Morristown National Historical Park near here. You have the same determination to succeed "on your own" that enabled Washington and his troops to survive the winter of 1779-80. You realized that the Federal Government is not so endowed as to be able to buy all desirable open space, so you went ahead on your own initiative. Such actions deserve to be trumpeted throughout the land as an abiding example of effective citizen action. I dare say Henry Thoreau would applaud.

Your responsibilities for Great Swamp do not terminate when the documents transfer from the Great Swamp Committee to the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. In fact, if other dedicated lands can serve as an example, they are only beginning. There will be schemes; there will be alternatives. Only a healthy political astuteness and concern for wise land and water use throughout your neighborhood will assure your long-range investment here.

Even at Walden Pond, where the Ambassador of India came to pay homage for Ghandi's debt, commercial recreationalists embarked upon a large road building, tree clearing, beach paving scheme. Protests poured in from all over the world, and finally an injunction from the Supreme Court of Massachusetts halted the devastation after an acre of trees had been cleared and part of a hillside pushed into the pond.

Here in the East--if we are not constantly watchful--much more of what we most cherish will also be pushed into the pond. It is in here, in this coastal population complex, where the conflict of interest is sharpest between those who recognize the absolute necessity of unspoiled coastal marshes for many forms of wildlife, and those who think of a marsh or swamp as land going to waste, unless it can be plowed into a quick dollar.

This year is the centennial of the death of Henry David Thoreau. Had he lived so long, I like to think that he would have been a member of your committee. He would have wanted to insure that the Great Swamp remained for the enjoyment of posterity.

The Great Swamp Wildlife Refuge will make the sign of the flying goose--the emblem of the national wildlife refuges--as well known as the emblems of the national forests and the national parks. Millions of visitors will meet this sign and respect it. It means that the land behind the sign has been dedicated by the American people to preserving, for themselves and their children, a segment of native wildlife in the heart of America's industrial factory.

The Department of the Interior plans to make the Great Swamp a national showcase for wildlife education and interpretation--an outdoor laboratory where the Thoreaus of tomorrow will be able to study the minutiae of nature, in depth.

Utmost care will be devoted to developing imaginative and sound interpretative features so the maximum number of students can benefit from the area, and leave the minimum of influence upon its fragile vegetation. Who knows, perhaps the bear who once roamed these lowlands, will be induced to return!

We are pioneering in Great Swamp--pioneering in private-Federal cooperation, and pioneering in establishment of a top-flight nature education facility. The Federal commitment to make this facility the finest in the land is just beginning. You too have a job in assuring that the catalytic ingredient of the swamp, its waters, remain clean and flowing from adequate upstream pollution control.

Those who stand to benefit most from whatever foresight we exert here are the young people of tomorrow.

A friend of mine, and a friend of all of ours, long ago wrote, "A boy could do worse than be a swinger of birches." Tonight I will add, "Or a trampler of swamps."

x x x